

2024 BHA Board Candidate

Steve Smalley



Profession and education: Attorney at Law for the past 28 years. Shareholder, Ogletree, Deakins, Raleigh, NC, 2000 - Present. J.D., Cumberland School of Law, Samford University; B.A. Rhodes College.

What is your history with Bald Head Island that has brought you to ownership and now a candidate for BHA? I have owned a home on BHI since 2010. It required extensive renovation from the start. Later, when Hurricane Florence heavily damaged my home, I made additional changes. Through my interactions with BHA/ARC both times, I gained perspective on the role of the BHA. I have served as a member of the BHI Club Golf Committee and Nominating Committee.

What professional skills and life experiences do you feel would be most valued as a member of the BHA Board? As an attorney, I will bring a strong track record of analyzing and resolving complex issues. I've found that the best way to resolve a problem is to listen, without judgment, and communicate clearly and without delay. In addition to my responsibility for client relationships and client budgets, I also built and manage a team. I've learned the hard challenge of achieving business growth while navigating bureaucratic regulation.

As a BHI property owner, what aspect of Island life is most important to you as a key to BHI's future and, if elected, how would you help craft that future? The island that we all love continues to grow. BHA's mission involves protecting the island's limited resources — and includes supporting responsible growth without stifling that growth.

Top priorities of the BHA must include: (1) Communication to island property owners on topics that fall within the scope of BHA's oversight; (2) Prompt and reasonable action on property improvement requests. I am committed to working with all property owners to ensure those priorities are best served for the betterment of our shared island.

Platform/Philosophy/Positions — Address these real-world questions:

The trend toward a "resort-like" Island poses issues for the property owners who favor a culture of stewardship and conservancy. What are some of the mechanisms BHA might use to address these issues? This question assumes that a problem exists, but it doesn't define that problem. It's a loaded question. What does it mean to say that the island is becoming "resort-like"? Is it, really? In what way?

Is it because the BHI Club has expanded? If so, the BHA doesn't oversee the Clubs on the island. Is it because new homes are built each year – something that has happened every year since the island was developed?

Much of the island's land is protected natural area that is subject to additional Federal or State restrictions, which are beyond the reach of the BHA. Commercial and municipal properties (as well as some residential properties) also fall outside the scope of the BHA's control.

Because BHA's covenants are limited to residential property, the best use of the BHA's resources is to focus on carrying out that core mission. BHA already has strong covenants in place that protect development of residential properties and BHA-owned common areas.

By concentrating on areas within its direct mission, BHA can focus its efforts to provide the most attentive service possible to residential property owners – including taking steps to speed ARC review – and to act in partnership, rather than opposition to homeowners seeking to make positive improvements to their properties.

I do not favor the use of BHA resources to take public advocacy positions, particularly if those positions fall outside the scope of BHA's authority to regulate residential property development. The BHA has no power to enforce commercial development, any more than it has legal authority to intervene in commercial transactions involving the transportation system.

Instead, by being the best residential homeowner's association that it can be, BHA can channel its considerable scope of authority over residential property development to ensure that island residential development and maintenance standards remain high.

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What are some ideas to help strengthen our “community” as a whole for all BHA members, without regard to how much time members spend on the Island? BHA can be a good voice for communication to island property owners. Although the current newsletters are well-prepared, we should evaluate the communication methods that are used by BHA and consider more frequent, shorter messages, rather than only a formal, long-format, monthly communication.

If you are elected to the Board, what initiatives would you propose and lead to help ensure participation among property owners, especially among members who are on the Island part-time? As discussed in my response to the prior question, I propose that we review the BHA’s communication strategy, evaluate whether it can be updated, and consider sending more frequent but shorter methods of communication.

A short weekly email would encourage participation by part-time island owners, who might not pay close attention to a monthly newsletter that was published three weeks before their next visit, for example. Sending an email newsletter via listserv or other commercially available and cost-effective newsletter system would raise awareness of upcoming meetings and activities. Such a system would also allow easier, automated updates to email addresses and owners’ contact information.

How could the BHA Board, the Village Council, BHI Limited and the BHI Clubs better work in tandem to ensure an alignment of respective organizational goals while also implementing collaborative plans for the Island? See my response to Question 1 as well. If the organizations are not regularly meeting to consult with one another on issues that affect each organization, then that represents an excellent opportunity to establish open lines of communication. Even litigation on one particular issue should not prevent regular communications on other topics of common interest.

For items that concern common or overlapping authority of entities – for example, residential property that abuts the BHI Club – there should be open communication channels to ensure that property rights and restrictions are aligned.

By contrast, there are other categories where the BHA doesn’t have a mandate nor oversight authority. Those situations need to be handled differently.

As an example, if the Village wishes to build a municipal building on Village land, the BHA does not regulate that decision, nor does it have architectural review authority. But by opening channels for regular communication and taking a collaborative approach, soft solutions can be achieved. As an example, BHA could offer suggestions for architectural or landscape design that would align with surrounding residential standards.

It seems that as of late, collaborative communication between island organizations has taken a back seat and been replaced by opposition. The interests of the various island organizations may not always align, but those organizations each have a shared interest in the success of the island and ensuring that it functions in the best interests of its owners and stakeholders.

What other issues should the BHA Board be discussing and considering? Why are they important? In my biographical statement, I stated that “I’ve found that the best way to resolve a problem is to listen, without judgment, and communicate clearly and without delay.”

I’ve offered a few suggestions. But as a new Board member, my most important job at the start will be to listen and gather ideas from the wealth of talented and experienced Board members, BHA staff, and island residents. Thank you for the opportunity to serve each of you.